

“Into this room the records of what our people aspired to and what they have accomplished should be collected and preserved, and on the walls of this room should be cut the literal records of the conception of our republic, its successful creation, the record of its westward movement to the Pacific, its presidents, how the memorial was built and, frankly. Why.” Gutzon Borglum.

The Hall of Records and the Great Stairway *By Lincoln Borglum*

The Hall of Records and Stairway have been part of the Memorial plan from the beginning and are provided for in the so-called “Rushmore Bill” of 1938. A good start has been made in the carving of the Hall, which already has been excavated to the extent of seventy feet. Great care has to be exercised in the use of dynamite in carving this hall, as in carving the faces on the mountain, not to injure the stone which is to remain. Careless explosions of large amounts of powder might crumble the walls.

The Hall is located about two thirds of the way up the mountain; the entrance to it is in a small gorge or canyon, cut by the ice aeons ago, to the right of the carved faces as one looks at them from below. The Hall is on the opposite side of the gorge from the heads and is not under them. The following is quoted from Mr. Borglum’s plan. “The façade to the Hall’s entrance is the mountain wall 140 feet high; supporting pylons, cut into the mountain, flank the entrance. The entrance door itself is 12 feet wide and 20 feet high; the walls are plain, dressed granite and of fine color. I want



to finish the inner entrance wall in mosaic of blue and gold lapis. The depth to the door entrance from the outer façade is 20 feet. The door, swung on a six inch offset of the wall, will be of bronze and glass. Small, carefully modeled bronze figures of historic importance from Columbus and Raleigh to the present day will ornament the doors or be modeled into the supporting frame. The walls of the entrance will carry in gilded bronze immediately within the entrance ancient Indian symbols; British, French, Spanish and American seals.”

“The floor of the Hall will be 100 by 80 by 32 feet to an arched ceiling. At the height of fifteen feet an historic frieze, four feet wide, will encircle the entire room. Recesses will be cut into these walls and be filled with bronze and glass

cabinets, which will hold the records stamped on aluminum sheets, rolled separately and placed in tubes. Busts of our leaders in all human activities will occupy the recesses between the cabinets. The original thought of a hall of human records I developed at Stone Mountain in Georgia and my drawings and full plans are extant; that was never completed.”

“The records of electricity, beginning with Franklin, which has given us light, heat, music, the radio, the telegraph, the telephone and controls in power the extent of which we can hardly imagine, must be here, together with the records of travel, immigration, religious development and also the record of perhaps the largest contribution that we have made to humanity, which has been free controlled peace, a government of the people, by and for the people.

Struggle as we will that great contribution is today the cause for the real unrest in Europe. Despotism, tyranny of every form is fighting us wherever it can, to take away from humanity the power freedom gives it-the power that freedom has given America.”

“The Hall will be reached by a monumental flight of steps varying from 15 to 20 feet in width, which will ascend the mountain in front, a little to one side of the sculpture, rising from a great granite disk or platform in the canyon below, which may be used as a rostrum from which speakers may address the public occupying the amphitheater facing that group.”

“These steps of granite and cement will be provided with seats at intervals of every fifty feet; they will have a five inch rise and an eighteen inch tread. The accession from the foot of the steps to the floor of the great entrance is four hundred feet; the entrance way from the steps’ landing to the great Hall 190 feet, the floor of this Hall, reached by three steps, is two feet above the floor of the entrance way in the canyon; this is to provide for proper drainage.”

Construction of the Hall took place between July 1938 and July 1939. Work was halted during July of 1939 when Congress directed that construction should be executed only on the faces. With Borglum’s death in 1941 and American involvement in World War II, all work on the Memorial came to a close on October 31, 1941.

Although Borglum’s grand scheme for the Hall of Records had to be abandoned the idea remained. On August 9, 1998, Gutzon Borglum’s dream was completed when a repository of records was placed in the floor of the hall entry. This repository consists of a teakwood box, inside a titanium vault, covered by a granite capstone. Etched on the capstone is the following quote by Gutzon Borglum:



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“...let us place there, carved high, as close to heaven as we can, the words of our leaders, their faces, to show posterity what manner of men they were. Then breathe a prayer that these records will endure until the wind and the rain alone shall wear them away.”



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The repository contains sixteen porcelain enamel panels. Inscribed on the panels is the story of how Mount Rushmore came to be carved, who carved it, the reasons for selecting the four presidents depicted on the mountain and a short history of the United States. This repository is not accessible to visitors but is left as a record for people thousands of years from now who may wonder how and why Mount Rushmore was carved.